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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

What is the Use of Religion?

MODERN religion is very largely a matter of phrases. By long usage certain expressions have acquired a value that does not naturally belong to them, but which, by the mere fact of tradition and custom, exert all the authority of rationally established propositions. Words and expressions of a certain kind become, as Oliver Wendell Holmes said, polarised. Particular implications have gathered round them, and these implications prevent those who hear them subjecting them to a careful and rational examination. They do not impose only upon those who hear them; they are equally effective with those who use them. The speaker or writer drugs himself before handing on the narcotic for the use of listener or reader. Observe the solemn and reverential way in which a Christian speaks of the Jesus of the New Testament or the God of the Bible. And consider the difference if the words Joshua and Jahveh were used in their place. Both would mean exactly the same, but in the latter case time has not been busy weaving the same associations, and the mind is left freer to examine the statements placed before it.

This is, indeed, one of the difficulties before the Free-thought propagandists. Most of my readers will be familiar with the old *Punch* cartoon of two costers quarrelling, and the friends of one of them urging him to "say somefink." "How can I?" was the reply. "e's bin and gorn and used up all the best words." It is much the same with religion. Being first in the field, and having such a long start, religion has, so to speak, cornered all the best words. It has dominated life for so long that naturally it has become the hardest of tasks to purify the non-religious aspects of their religious associations. And the more insecure the fundamental religious beliefs become, the more strenuously religious struggle to retain the use of words that appeal powerfully to man's social nature. Truth, justice, morality, aspiration, idealism, etc., are all used as though they were parts of essential religion, and by constant association quite separate things are regarded as identical. The tactical advantage given to the religionist by this policy is obvious: The Freethinker is made to appear as fighting against certain things when, as a matter of fact, he is only contending for their independent existence and value.

I was reminded of this truth while turning over the pages of a book written by a well-known philosopher, who referred to "Freethinkers" whose attitude to religious problems proves how little sense they have when dealing with some of the deepest of human needs. That is a very common way of facing the philosophy of Free thought. And in an ordinary case one might well let it pass without

comment. But when one finds men of ability repeating such very, very cheap way of avoiding difficulties that should be dealt with in all decent respect.

On what ground can it be argued that religion is one of man's deepest needs? Is it that religion is, in a general sense, universal? No Freethinker will dispute that proposition. Human societies everywhere have developed some sort of a religion. That is admitted. The Freethinker is the first to point to the truth of this, and his philosophy is in nowise disturbed by the admission. For on that he has two comments to make. The first is explanatory. He points out under what conditions religious beliefs originate. He shows that they are natural, and therefore inevitable to the human mind at one stage of its development. They do not emphasise a need, they merely express a conclusion that ignorance everywhere draws in the face of phenomena not properly understood.

The second comment is that if religion is, indeed, man's deepest need, it should become more firmly established, more difficult to eradicate, as the race grows older. But everyone knows that the very opposite of this is the case. All over the civilised world religion sits lightly upon an increasing number of people. Millions have rejected it altogether. How, then, can religion be called one of man's deepest needs? A deep and fundamental need cannot be suppressed. If a need is suppressed, its superficial character is demonstrated. But here is something that men and women can get on without; they are—in the light of every rational test—none the worse for being without it. They confess to no sense of loss at its absence. And their number precludes their case being dismissed as the manifestation of an abnormality. It is sheer folly to speak of, as man's deepest need, something that millions deliberately reject, and which is weakening even with those who still retain it.

Let me emphasise the fact that reaching the Free thought position is essentially a question of growth. That is true both historically and individually. The further back we go in human history—taking things generally—the more religious we find people as a whole. The non-religious man is unknown to primitive society. For good or ill, he is a product of civilisation, of culture, of acquired and inherited knowledge. And, individually, it is a simple and easily verified truth that the overwhelming majority of non-religious men and women commenced their lives with a belief in religion. Their Free thought represents sheer growth. Religious belief antedates advanced culture both historically and individually. The man who never thinks about religion, who never tests its teachings, remains a supporter of religion. I do not mean by this that the man who remains religious never thinks about it. Such a statement would be absurd. He may think and *may* remain religious; if he does not think, he is certain to continue so.

But the man who does not think about it cannot become a Freethinker. In the main, religion in civilised society is something that a man inherits; it is due to no mental activity on his part. On the other hand, Freethought is something he acquires. He must think. Rightly or wrongly he must use his intelligence. It is a question of growth. And the problem of perpetual motion is simple compared to the task of explaining the process by which man outgrows his deepest need.

The notion that religion is man's deepest need is pure fallacy. It is not even his most enduring need. By a mere accident of association religion has been connected with all the more important affairs. The reign of the priesthood has secured the connection of religion with marriage, with the family, with birth and with death. It has secured it a place in private and public life, and given religion authority to which it has no valid claim. But the whole process of civilisation consists in breaking down this connection, and in secularising human life. And if this is accomplished; if the purely social aspect of human life, from the cradle to the grave, is once recognised, how long will religion maintain its power? The essential nature of religion is contained in one word—supernaturalism. Divest religion of this, and all that is left is a mere name. And it is not the Freethinker only who says that the supernatural does not exist. It is the message of all modern scientific thought.

What need of human nature is there that is dependent upon religion? It is certainly not the need for beauty, for art, for poetry, for literature. All these have existed, and do exist, quite apart from religion. Family life, with all the affections that cluster round domesticity, are independent of religion. Social existence is equally independent. In all these instances religion does not help; it is helped. When appeals are made, in the name of religion, for social justice, what is it that is touched—man's sense of justice or his religious belief? By nature, man is not a religious animal at all. As I have already said, that is something he acquires. But man is a social animal; and nothing can rob him of that quality without destroying his character as a human being. In short, once we get above the stage of primitive life, religion ever after lives by exploiting human nature. It has taught people to express themselves in terms of religion, much as the feeling of social solidarity is made to express itself in terms of personal loyalty to a reigning monarch. Those who look a little deeper into things, however, know that just as a feeling of loyalty to a king is no more than an accidental expression of the feeling of social unity, created and strengthened by generations of social life, so the connection of religion with the real needs of life is by nature accidental, and is doomed to disappear as man becomes aware of the true nature of the social forces.

The Freethinker is not, then, blind to the "deepest human needs." On the contrary, he is keenly alive to their reality and importance. His opposition to religion is not based upon ignoring certain aspects of human nature, but upon recognising all and allowing for all. It is too often assumed that the Freethinker denies the "facts" of the religious life. He does not; he recognises them all and explains them all. The issue is not one of a dispute about "facts" or "needs", it is really a dispute on a matter of interpretation. Are we to accept the naturalistic or the

supernaturalistic interpretation? That is the whole issue and there never has been any other. The Freethinker admits the value of much that the modern religionist talks so much about, but he points out that complete satisfaction for every aspect of human life is to be found apart from religion. And the proof of the truth of this is found in the fact that such satisfaction is found. Millions of men and women, neither the least worthy nor the least intelligent are finding to-day in social life all that the religionist finds in connection with religion, and their doing so is really conclusive. For just as the majority of these were once religionists, so religionists will one day be where they are. They have passed through the religious phase of development; and their having passed through it is proof, not that religion is one of man's deepest needs, but that it is a new phase of his development, and is to-day as reminiscent of a lower culture-stage as many parts of the body are reminiscent of his simian ancestry.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE FRIARS OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

IN his painstaking study, "English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages," the late Dr. J. J. Jusserand illumines an extensive territory. The Roman roads are shown to have remained the chief means of communication between one city and another while mere tracks served the rural dwellers when travelling to and fro to hamlet or village. Still, merchants, pedlars and messengers, however slowly they journeyed, reached their destination, unless overtaken by hurricane or flood or waylaid and plundered by bandits who lurked in the densely grown forests.

Among the wayfarers were the wandering preachers, mostly of peasant extraction. These roaming priests naturally encouraged the aspirations of their rustic kindred who were striving for emergence from serfdom to relative freedom. As Jusserand observes, the preachers, some of whom served to spread Wyclif's heresies, also helped to prepare the way for the Peasants' Revolt in 1381. These men were freelances, most certainly not countenanced by Holy Church, as they were "without the licence of our revered Father the Pope," or other ecclesiastics. Also these insurgent preachers discoursed on the social evils of the time, while hair-splitting theology was virtually ignored. They were cited to appear before the Church ordinaries, but they usually disregarded the summons, sheriffs and other officials were directed "to watch with care these wandering preachers and send to prison those who are not in due order."

The most popular preacher of this period was probably the priest John Ball, who, Froissart assures us, harangued the people as they left church after mass. His insistence on human equality gained many converts. "So," writes Jusserand, "the enthusiastic multitude promised to make this apostle archbishop and chancellor of that kingdom in which he dreamed he could see, 'equal liberty, equal greatness, equal power' for all; but he was taken, drawn, hanged, beheaded and quartered, and his dream remained a dream."

In this benighted age, very few indeed left their monastic retreats or paternal domiciles to win converts by the way. One of the most noteworthy of these exceptions was Richard Rolle, who left his father's house at an early age to lead a meditative and mournful life in rural surroundings where he ever supplicated and mortified the flesh. Crowds flocked to his hermit's cell to enjoy his exhortations. He became a visionary and, according to his own account, the Devil himself tempted him in the form of a beautiful and enticing female who led

once fallen in love with him. He withstood the temptation, however, but with extreme difficulty. He then left his hermitage and became an itinerant preacher, but ended his life as a solitary, and edified his neighbours by his devotions. "Scarcely was he dead," avers Jusserand, "than his tomb became an object of pilgrimage, pious people brought offerings there, miracles were accomplished. In the convent of nuns at Ham-pole, which drew great honour from the vicinity of his tomb, there was immediately composed an 'office of St. Richard the Hermit' destined to be sung when he was canonised."

Apparently, however, Rolle has never been officially recognised as a saint.

In addition to the Lollard teachers who wandered by the wayside, there arrived the Dominican and Franciscan friars who came to England in the 13th Century. Chaucer and Langland had a very poor opinion of these mendicant Orders, whom they regarded as impudent and rapacious vagabonds. Jusserand, however, opines that the friars, at least for a time, were not always as black as they were painted. But, although Jack Straw would have eliminated all ecclesiastics save the friars alone, the degradation of these mendicant roamers later became glaringly evident.

At first the friars were extremely popular and soon aroused the animosity of the monks. Pledged to poverty by their founders the Black and Grey Friars soon acquired riches. "By a curious contradiction," comments Jusserand, "their poverty had attracted riches to them, and their self-denial, power; the hovels where they lodged at first had become sumptuous monasteries with chapels as large as cathedrals; the rich had themselves buried there, in tombs chiselled with the latest refinements of florid Gothic." The Kings themselves decorated Franciscan buildings with artistic altars and other adornments. City magnates followed royal example, and the rules laid down by St. Francis were completely violated. No wonder Wyclif and his adherents derided Franciscan insincerity.

The opulence and display of the Dominicans were equally inconsistent. The splendours of one of their convents were minutely described by a contemporary writer who noted "the sculptures, paintings and gildings that adorned the chapel, the magnificent coloured windows ornamented with the arms of the nobles or the mark of the merchants who had given them the imposing tombs of knights and ladies stretched out in brilliant dress heightened with gold."

Pity was replaced by pride, and the now wealthy friars devoted ever-decreasing attention to the ethical aspects of their cult while upholding the worldly and mercenary interests of their respective Orders. The high estimation which they once held with the people faded away. Social injustices abounded, while the unprotesting friars waxed in opulence and their unashamed self-seeking only too well justified the scornful reproaches of the monks, even if these were partly attributable to professional jealousy.

Thomas Walsingham, who penned his "History of England" in the 14th Century, asserts that: "The friars, unmindful of their profession, have even forgotten to what end their orders were instituted; for the holy men their law-givers desired them to be poor and free of all kinds of temporal possessions. . . . But now they are envious of possessions, approve the crimes of the great, and force the commonality into error and praise the sins of both; and with the intent of acquiring possessions, they who had renounced possessions, with the intent of gathering money, they who had sworn to persevere in poverty, call good evil and evil good, lead astray princes by adulation, the people by lies, and withdraw both with themselves out of the straight path."

Yet, however contemptible the friars may have seemed, and a popular saying of the time ran: "He is a friar and therefore a bar"; if not loved he was frequently feared as the custodian of the keys to salvation. Still, save in sickness or at the approach of death, the peasantry resented the arrogance the friars assumed. Indeed, so unpopular had they become by 1385

that a royal proclamation was deemed necessary to protect them from insult and assault.

In fact, the friars had become both a pest and a drain on the resources of the State. Parliament complained that a large proportion of friars were aliens who constituted a serious danger to the community. The Commons therefore recommended their expulsion under penalty of outlawry. In reply the friars assumed a lofty attitude and averred that they were amenable to the Pope alone and were, *de facto*, independent Orders.

Also the wandering friars entered into severe competition with the parish priests whose flocks strayed when the interlopers laid aside their staves and wallets and preached and confessed wherever listeners or penitents could be found. Although the Church Council of Salzburg in 1386 denounced them as false prophets who "by their fables lead astray the souls of their hearers," the friars were so firmly seated that censure proved vain, despite their notorious knavery and duplicity. As Jusserand notes: "Every class of society had a grievance against them; lords, bishops, monks, Wyclif's followers, and the men of the people; still they kept their place; men found them everywhere at the same time, in the cabin and in the castle, begging from the rich and knocking also at the door of the poor."

Not only did the friars insinuate themselves into the good graces of the powerful, but some also filled their wallets with thread, ointments, knives and other commodities and traded as pedlars. But they soon found the sale of indulgences more profitable, and proceeded from place to place "selling to pious souls under the name of *letters of fraternity*, drafts from heaven." These parchments were warranted to confer a share in the alleged excellencies of the entire Order of St. Francis.

By trading on popular fears, ignorance and superstition, the friars continued to exercise immense authority, although their reputation grew worse and worse during the 15th Century, while in the 16th, men so adverse in outlook as Sir Thomas More and Tyndal agreed in regarding them as a set of idle imposters.

T. F. PALMER.

MOTHER CHURCH APPRECIATES A CONTRIBUTION !

THE farmer found the priest looking at the ginger cat. "How much do you want for your cat?" said the priest, as if he had suddenly made up his mind about something. The farmer stooped to the cat and scratched it under the chin. "I wouldn't sell my old cat for fifty pounds," he said. Of course it was quite a young cat.

About a week later, the priest took a short cut through the farmer's yard and saw the ginger cat again. "That's a capital cat," said the priest, "I could do with a cat like that." The farmer did his best to "respect the cloth."

The next time the priest went to Bull Pin Farm he went with a sack. It was market day. When the farmer got home, the ginger cat was missing. And he couldn't go to the priest's house about it, for it's mighty difficult for a working man to accuse a reverend of being a thief. However, the farmer told the world at "The Fallen Sparrow" that night, exactly how much he intended to put in the plate next Sunday.

It was about six months before the priest came back to Bull Pin Farm carrying a sack once more. The farmer was standing in his yard with a ruminative look in his eyes. The priest opened the sack and tipped out the ginger cat. "There's your old cat," said the priest, "We've got a lot of new little gingers now at the presbytery." "Well!" said the farmer as he stooped to scratch the capital ginger queen under the chin.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

ACID DROPS

The Bishop of Ely appears to be surprised and hurt that Communists show an eager readiness to work. He also thinks that "the primary cause of the weakness of the Christian Church is just that most Christians are not prepared to take trouble over their religion." We can hardly believe that the Bishop can be so blind to the fact that Christian leaders are aware of the cause of the falling of Christianity. Actually, the only force that will kill religion is that of being found out, and just now that disease is very active with every form of religion. Like other religions Christianity is dying, and its rate of dying is increasing every year.

Complaints are being made concerning the salary of Ministers in Glasgow. It seems they are not receiving more than four hundred a year. We must confess that the amount mentioned is not very great as things are nowadays. Of course, the matter does not come under our concern, but business is business and the preacher should be properly paid. We suggest a plan. It is well known that, if preachers are underpaid, most of the churches are only thinly occupied. Why not reduce the number of preachers by closing some of the churches, and so reduce the sums now paid for preaching. Generally speaking that should give the payment to run to double the salary that preachers get now. We charge nothing for the suggestion.

The Church of England has, through a commission, decided that atomic bombs should be used. Says the report:—

"On the assumption that to-day the possession of atomic weapons is genuinely necessary for national self-preservation, a Government, which is responsible for the safety of the community committed to its charge, is entitled to manufacture them and hold them in readiness.

The commission believes, moreover, that in certain circumstances defensive 'necessity' might justify their use against an unscrupulous aggressor.

Any nation, or any group of nations, which was resolved to resist aggression of the kind supposed, should let it be known that it held itself entitled to defend itself in this way.

In our judgment, such warning might go far to prevent the abuse of atomic weapons."

But the commission is of a gentle nature, so it is advised that the atomic bomb is inadmissible in inhabited cities. That shows the gentleness of the Church of England, for we can always depend that in the middle of a war all steps will be taken to see that people in cities are not blown to pieces.

Our Chancellor of the Exchequer never misses an opportunity to tell the world that we can do wonders in secular matters, and then straightaway discovers that we cannot do what we wish unless we get on the right side of God—which is sheer nonsense. Other things equal, God is of very little consequence. A man can be honest, loyal and in every way admirable without bothering gods at all. A belief in gods adds nothing to the qualities of a man or a woman. Our Chancellor may insist that he must have God, but that is just the nonsense of an unbalanced brain. The truth is that people have got into the habit of talking in a fantastic and foolish way. The evidence for this would be shown quickly if any one said that he could do nothing without God. The importance of the belief in God is not what Gods do for man, but what man does for gods. It is a case of extrinsic, not intrinsic values. The god idea belongs to man, it has nothing whatever to do with a self-existing god. We take it that our Chancellor of the Exchequer finds that using these fantastic ideas gives him time to throw out more sensible ones.

Eight tenants in Dumerag can't hang out their washing on Sundays. There is now going on a lot of discussions, appeals to old habits, etc., but the need for washing goes on. But in the Commandments there is no "Thou shalt wash." There are a number of regulations concerning water, and so forth, but in the Christian teachings there is no "Thou shalt wash regularly." And in heaven such a thing as washing day was never heard of.

We are pleased to see that the writings of George Eliot are being read once again. We need hardly say that George Eliot

was not her real name. The writer was a woman, and a very distinguished one, but in her day it was not quite respectable for women to write novels. Nevertheless, it is to her undying credit that she spoke openly about the clergy of her day. Here is the way in which she depicted the quality of the majority of God's special servants:—

"Given a man with modest intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence, a great glibness of speech, what is the career in which, without the aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society? Where is the Goshen of mediocrity in which a smattering of science and learning will pass for profound instruction, where platitudes will be accepted as wisdom, bigoted narrowness as holy zeal, unctuous egotism as God-given piety. Let such a man become a preacher and he will find it possible to reconcile small ability with great ambition, superficial knowledge with the prestige of erudition, a middling morale with a high reputation for sanctity."

Some who have read this account of clergymen in the last century, may take it that the picture of the clergy was exaggerated. We realise that there were good men in the Church, but the picture is not over exaggerated.

Take another opinion written, much later, by Lord Morley, a prominent politician and author. Writing of the clergy of his day, he says:—

"It is not a light thing to have to secure a livelihood on condition of going through life masked and gagged. To be compelled week after week, and year after year, to recite the symbols of ancient faith, and lift up his voice in the echoes of hopes, with the blighting thought in his soul that the hope is a lie, no better than the folly of a crowd, to read hundreds of times in the twelve-month, to go on to the end of his days administering to simple folk, when he has in his mind at each phrase, what dupes are these simple folk, and how wearisome are their rites, and to know that all this is really to be one long prostituted life."

Here are two bitter outbursts from a man and a woman, saying no more than was bare truth. Can anyone say that the clergy of to-day are of better stuff than the clergy of yesterday? We doubt it. The truth is that the quality of the clergy to-day is lower than it was a few generations past. The churches are emptying rapidly. The preachers are of a lower quality. The older generations did at least believe in what they said. Now no one can be sure of even that.

Cardinal Griffin has suggested that there should be an international defence force to protect Holy places in Palestine. But why should we take that trouble when the Cardinal is in close touch with God, Jesus, and crowds of heavenly angels who are always helping mankind with their presence? Why not get some of these characters to appear at the proper time and place, as they are reputed to have done over and over again? That would give the Roman Church an advertisement such as nothing else would.

We think we could give Dean Inge much better evidence of why Christianity was doomed to death. It was the decay of the Roman Empire that gave Christianity its chance, and it is upon Man's ills that Christianity waxed. We agree with the Christian lecturer who said:—

"When man loses the mental balance and moral poise that civilisation has given him, he slips back to the unevilsed stage out of which he has only just emerged, and he becomes again a child whimpering in the dark, seeking consolation in the childish things that he had placed on one side during his short-lived period of maturity."

The revival of religion is the reerudescence of the savage.

Take the matter a little further. A religion that is real springs from the life and thought of the people. It does not need a national service. It is only when religion is dying, or has no real connection with the people, that it needs some help. Civilised man never discovers gods, he forgets them. It is the semi-savage that plays the part of midwife to the gods. You may have a progressive civilisation, or you may have religion, but you can not have both.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. K. DUNSTAN, N.22.—Thanks for compliments. Will be pleased to send you back numbers for re-distribution. Will also send free to any address 4 issues of the "Freethinker" on receipt of 4 penny stamps.

ANDREW CORINA.—There is a world of difference between reading out conditions for a settlement and accepting them. A settlement on the conditions offered was impossible, the matter was important to the well-being of the Society.

For the "Freethinker".—Mr. and Mrs. C. POTTER, 10s.; Mr. E. HORROCKS, Australia, £1 3s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

All is now ready for the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society in Manchester on Whit-Sunday, May 16. A reception in The Grosvenor Hotel, Deansgate, Manchester, at 7-30 p.m., on the Saturday, will provide members and friends an opportunity for getting to know each other.

The business sessions will take place on Sunday in the same hotel, beginning at 10-30 a.m. and 2-30 p.m. At these sessions only members of the N.S.S. with current card of membership can attend and take part. A demonstration in The Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, Manchester, will bring the day to a close. A conference lunch will be provided in the Grosvenor Hotel for which tickets must be booked in advance. The General Secretary, at 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, will give any further information required.

A debate has been arranged for to-day (Sunday) in the Mansfield (Notts.), Clerkson Street Hall, between Mr. W. W. Bradwell (N.C.L.C.) and Mr. T. M. Mosley, who is well known on our platform. The subject for discussion is "The Case for Religion" and proceedings begin at 6-30 p.m.

Mr. L. Ebury opens his season at Highbury Corner this evening (Sunday) at 7 p.m.; it is hoped that the local saints will turn up in full support. Mr. Ebury is a hard worker and deserves all the support possible.

The Bishop of Ely is disturbed by the State of the Christian Church. His complaints are many, and he says that in the past fifteen years there has been a great division between those who live by the Christian rule and those who are ready to deny it. He says: "It seems quite clear that there are strong forces gathering to attack religion. . . Priests have the bitter experience of seeing their congregation slipping away." We need only add that when men and women become Atheists there is no such thing as turning back.

DUALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

III.

ORMUZD VERSUS AHRIMAN

THE Philosophy of Dualism can be traced back as far as the mythology of Ancient Egypt where, as surviving Egyptian art discloses, we have the clear antithesis between the good Osiris and the evil Set. However, the cults of Ancient Egypt were still too vague, its gods too numerous and, we may also add, too indistinct to allow us to describe from the single antinomy of Osiris and Set the entire Egyptian system as falling within the realm of dualistic theology.

Nor could the ancient pre-exilic Jewish creed be described as such. The angelic "Satan" who figures so dramatically in the Book of Job—if indeed this was a Jewish work, and not an Arabic saga—is in no sense the rival of God. Contrarily, he is the celestial courier who works indefatigably and ubiquitously in the Divine service. Incidentally, even in Job, the moral character disclosed by Satan seems a little out of keeping in the inner circle of an all-good Deity.

Whether originated by him or not, the first major dualistic creed was that taught by the Persian "Moses," Zoroaster, probably about 600 B.C.—the precise date is disputed. In the cosmic theology of the Persian sage, which still finds a feeble echo in the Parseeism of to-day, the universe was externally rent by the undying war between the good Ormuzd, the God of Light, and the fell Ahriman, the maleficent spirit of Darkness. That in this external conflict between the rival Creators, the good Ormuzd would eventually be victorious seems to have been a sort of pious hope amongst the Zoroastrian faithful, but the actual logic of Dualism seems to require that this fundamental conflict should be everlasting. We may add, however, that it was definitely ethical in character, disfigured as it was, and is still, by ritualistic puerilities. The creed of Zoroaster was as definitely ethical as was its contemporary moralistic monotheism of the Hebrew prophets. That is, Ormuzd was really good, at least as a Persian of 600 B.C. conceived goodness: whilst Ahriman equally was what corresponded with his idea of badness.

Zoroastrianism had historically, two major epochs of flourishing activity. In the first, about 530 to 330 B.C., from the foundation of the Archemenian Empire of Darius Hystaspes and his successors, down to the overthrow of that Empire by Alexander of Macedon, Zoroaster ruled spiritually over the Persian world-empire which, in the words of the Biblical book of Esther, ruled from "India to Ethiopia," a magnificent political creation, to which the hostile Greek historians, who are our sole extant authorities, have done much less than justice. However, throughout this first period Zoroaster's genuine creed of ethical Dualism seems to have been much corrupted by the more primitive cults of the "Magian" Shamans.

The conquest of Alexander ended this period. But five centuries later Persia revived under the Sassanid Dynasty, the ancient land of Iran again became a great power, in fact, the sole remaining rival to the Roman Empire in the civilised world, concurrently Zoroastrianism revived also, and enjoyed a sort of golden age as the national creed of the Second Persian Empire. The new Zoroastrianism was more doctrinally pure than earlier forms, and also more intolerant. It persecuted impartially Christianity—probably as the "5th column" of its Roman rival—and such later Dualistic heresies as Manicheanism. But its era of prosperity was abruptly ended by the lightning conquests of Islam both more rapid and more durable than were those of Alexander, in the early 7th Century of the Christian era. Since the "Battle of Persia" ended in the Arabic invaders' favour, Iran has been a Muslim land, its ancient dualism tolerated or proscribed, and only a handful of Parsee exiles in Indian Bombay keep alive the name and practise the tenets of Zoroaster.

Dualism, however, did not perish with the Persian Nation, instead it took wings to the West. Throughout the Catholic Middle Ages in Europe, dualism was a name of dread, from Pope Leo ("the Great") in the 5th Century to the founders of the Inquisition in the 13th. Dualism in its Manichean form was represented in the Catholic world—by a sort of inverted dualism itself—as the pre-eminent power of Darkness contrasted to the Catholic world of Light.

In the Roman Empire, particularly in its eastern—Asiatic—provinces contiguous with Persia, there arose in the early centuries of the Christian era a whole swarm of Gnostic sects, some describing themselves as Christian, most of which professed a Dualistic theology. The orthodox Christian literature of these centuries re-echoes with angry denunciations of these heresies—a new and terrible word.

Historically, the most important of these early heresiarchs was Marcion (c. 150 A.D.) from Pontus, on the Persian border. Marcion founded a dualistic Christian Church in which the good God of the Christians "The Stranger" was contrasted with the evil Jahveh, the maleficent god of the Jews, whose offspring was the biblical Satan. The Canonical author of the Fourth Gospel, a contemporary of Marcion, makes his Jesus talk like a good Marcionite, he tells the Jews "ye are the father of the devil," that is, the Marcionite Jehovah. More concretely, Marcion, whose importance in the history of Christian origins has only recently been appreciated, was the publisher of the first "New Testament" and the first editor of the Pauline Epistles, of much of which he may well have been the actual author.

The fame of Marcion, however, was eclipsed by that of the Babylonian Dualist, Mani (Latin Manichaeus, 3rd Century A.D.). The most famous of all Dualist teachers since Zoroaster, to whom he stands historically in much the same position as does St. Paul to the original founders of Christianity. For Mani founded what was for a millennium a world-religion which bore much the same relation to nationalistic Persian Zoroastrianism as that in which Pauline Christianity stood to nationalistic Judaism.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Mani, who according to tradition died at the instigation of the Zoroastrian priests, ranked as the religious rival of Jesus and Mohammed, and only an historical accident prevents him from so standing to-day. His religion, an eclectic dualism, with a basis in Zoroastrianism and borrowings from Christianity, Judaism and even Buddhism, was impartially persecuted by Pagans, Christians and Mohammedans, and had countless martyrs. It spread from China to North Africa.

In the latter country it commanded for a time the allegiance of the great St. Augustine of Hippo, whose magnum opus, "The City of God", created a nominally Christian historiography based on a thorough-going Manichean dualism. For the "Two Cities" whose external rivalry forms the central theme of that famous work which dominated the European historical philosophy of the next millennium, is an essentially dualistic conception.

The mediaeval era witnessed a host of dualistic (self-styled) Christian heresies, the most famous of which were the Cathari, or Albigenses, who were virtually exterminated in the 13th Century by that Roman "Gestapo" the Inquisition. A fascinating account of these sects can be found in Mr. Stephen Runciman's recent important monograph, "The Mediaeval Manichee" (Cambridge University Press, 1947), to which learned work we refer the curious reader.

In modern times popular theological dualism seems to have made its exit from the historical stage. But has it done so in reality, or has it merely gone underground for a while? Modern science has transformed the whole "Problem of Evil" by transferring it, so to speak, from the abstract realm of metaphysics to the concrete sphere of social psychology. But should a Dark Age arise anew from the chaos engendered by atomic war, then the Dark Gods of the underworld may start up afresh to reclaim

their ancient dominion over an evil world. It is for social science to lay Ahriman, God of Evil, finally at rest by destroying his birthplace, which is also his last refuge: the dark places of the human heart and of the social order.

F. A. RIDLEY.

BUDDHISM AND FREETHOUGHT

I.

A FRIEND of mine, Mr. R. J. Jackson, sent me his excellently written pamphlet, "Buddhism and God," the other day, and it may prove interesting to say something about Buddha and his religion especially as it is claimed that Buddha himself was if not an outright Atheist, at least one who had no use whatever for the gods, if there were any.

My own difficulty at the outset is that even if Buddha was as much of an Atheist and Materialist as I am, I cannot see why I should want to be a Buddhist. I am pleased to think that the head of a great religion like Buddhism which has perhaps 500 million followers, came to the conclusion centuries before our era that God was a myth; but I came to the same conclusion myself without knowing anything about him, and in this small matter we are equals.

Another difficulty which makes it hard for me to embrace Buddhism is that it is so much like Christianity. As that great authority on Buddhism, Rhys Davids, has said:—

"One of the most curious facts in the whole history of the world is that Buddhism and Christianity have both developed in the course of fifteen hundred years, into sacerdotal and sacramental systems, each with its bells and rosaries and images and holy water; each with its services in dead languages, with choirs and processions and creeds and incense, in which the laity are spectators only; each with its mystic rites and ceremonies performed by shaven priests in gorgeous robes; each with its abbots and monks and nuns of many grades; each with its worship of virgins, saints, and angels; its reverence to the Virgin and the Child; its confessions, fasts and purgatory; its idols, relics, symbols and sacred pictures; its shrines and pilgrimages; each with its huge monasteries and gorgeous cathedrals, its powerful hierarchy and its wealthy cardinals; each, even, ruled over by a Pope, with its triple tiara on his head and the sceptre of temporal power in his hand, the representative on earth of an eternal Spirit in the heavens."

Of course, I am well aware of the argument that all these things were unknown to Buddha himself—Christians say the same thing about Jesus; or at least, they are always imploring us to go back to the "pure" and "unparalleled" teachings of Jesus, and give up "Churchianity." Actually, even reverent Rationalists talk in the same way; and they become very disgruntled if we don't.

Then again, there is the question of the historicity of Buddha. As readers are aware, I do not believe for a moment that Jesus ever lived—he is a myth—and I am always astonished to find Freethinkers objecting to what they call such a "radical" view. What is the position regarding Buddha—that is, Gotama Sakyamuni, to give him his proper name?

In his well-known work "Orpheus", Saloman Reinach says that "though the actual existence of Gautama called the Buddha Sakyamuni has been questioned by Indian authorities, it does seem that there are some grounds for belief in the traditions which we possess about his life." There are then, even in India, authorities who question the story of Gotama; and Reinach is also obliged to point out that "the collection of the sacred Buddhist writings, far more voluminous than our Bible, does not contain a line which can be attributed to Buddha or any of his immediate disciples." Buddha, then, in spite of his magnificent education, never left a line of writing, and in this respect exactly like our Jesus.

When was Jesus born? We simply do not know. When was Buddha born? Reinach gives the date as "towards 520 B.C."; Rhys Davids, who is considered the greatest authority in England, does not, I think give any exact date, but says "about 500 years before the birth of Christ." Harmsworth's *Encyclopædia* gives 560, while the *Century Cyclopaedia* of Names gives between 562 and 552 B.C. The Schaff-Herzog *Encyclopædia* says Gotama was born either 622 or 556 B.C.; so there is, as in the case of Jesus, a good choice.

Then the one point insisted upon by all good Christians—even those who have a little doubt about the truth of the Virgin Birth—is that Jesus Christ was absolutely sinless. There are no reservations as a rule. Even those reverent Rationalists who want us to go back to Jesus as a Man and not as a God would be ready to admit, I am sure, that the word "absolute" is *a sine qua non* whenever the sinlessness of Jesus is mentioned. It is far more unthinkable to imagine Jesus telling a lie, for example, than George Washington. I find precisely the same in the case of Buddha. He was, says Rhys Davids, "very early regarded as omniscient, and absolutely sinless." This word "absolutely" is, I find, much admired by Buddhists.

As an example take the word "Nirvana." Mr. Jackson tells us that "the state of Nirvana is a state of absolute calm, produced by the utter absence of passion." Personally, I would be bored stiff by Nirvana, but apart from that, I do deprecate the use of these "absolutes." I simply cannot picture to myself any state of absolute calm—except death, and as I shall not be able to contemplate myself then, I am not in the least interested. The most intriguing thing about Nirvana is however, as Mr. Jackson says, that "Buddhism proclaims the glad tidings that it is present with us here and now." So the "absolute calm" is not death, and is here now. But why "glad tidings"? Glad tidings to whom?

The real truth is that the blessed bliss of Nirvana seems to me to be exactly like the Christian heaven, where absolute peace prevails, and where the good Christians residing there sing Hosannahs all day long. Personally, I should loathe even a brief visit to such Elysian fields, and I feel the same of Nirvana.

Mr. Jackson sensed something of this for he points out that "Salvation does not consist in going to Heaven or in attaining individual bliss of any kind; it is simply and solely deliverance from error, especially from the illusion of selfhood with all the sin and evil which arise from that illusion." I can only say here that I don't want to be "saved" either in the Christian sense or in the Buddhist sense. I deny as strongly as I can that there is any "sin and evil" in "selfhood" or that "selfhood" is an "illusion." I consider all this talk to be on a par with I nearly said on an "absolute" par—with the rubbish that we get in most Christian sermons. It means "absolutely" nothing.

The truth is that this terrific desire of Christians and Buddhists to "save" individual "souls" bores me to death. It is one of the reasons why I have resolutely set myself against all religions. I haven't one, and I do not want one. But in this I am, of course, speaking for myself. If anybody else feels an urgent impulse to go and preach salvation—Christian, Buddhist, Marxist, Fascist—that is a purely personal matter. That Buddha was, for his day, a great man I do not deny, but I cannot see why this should urge his admirers to talk about him as if he were not a great man, but a Great God. Even while putting forward the claim that he was an Atheist, I have always an uneasy suspicion that Buddhists are simply itching to refer to him as the "Lord Buddha"—exactly like Christians in a hushed voice say "the Christ." Perhaps I am constitutionally incapable of reverence, and therefore apostles of any religion must look upon me with horror.

Whether Buddha really believed in some kind of a God may be argued, of course; and Mr. Jackson claims that it is, when "purged of all false anthropomorphism (*sic*) and superstition," a

"purely spiritual one." What this means I do not know; but the author adds that "it is more than 'existence', it is the womb of existence." Here I am beaten, for frankly, I cannot conceive anything *more* than existence, which is (for me) everything that is, including the "womb."

What a whirl of words we get into once we embark on explaining a particular philosophy! H. CUTNER.

CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,—A few weeks ago Mr. Poynter commended a letter of mine that appeared in your paper, calling me brave because of the views I expressed in it. I thank Mr. Poynter for the compliment, but I am no braver than many other Freethinkers. I have winced and cried aloud, like any animal, when in pain. In moments of extreme anguish I have, like Mr. Poynter, been on the point of throwing myself on the bosom of a slain mother. Freethought is a discipline, not a sanctuary. In the long run I have found it a salutary discipline.

I sincerely feel for Mr. Poynter in his sufferings and wish I could help him. If I were the Catholic God I might do so. I say "might" because of the fickle impulses of that popular Deity.

Mr. Poynter will believe as he wills to believe. How the "governmental system" of the Catholic Church could have been the main reason for his apostasy is beyond my comprehension.

Perhaps those of us who have lived all their lives in a country like South Africa, with its vast plains and lofty mountains, get closer to nature than you in snug and pretty England. Nature, so innocently irresponsible, so indifferently sublime. What bliss it is to have nothing or nobody to thank or blame for life's ecstasies and afflictions!

Listen to Santayana: "Why should we not look on the universe with piety? It is the dispenser of all our joys. It is not wicked. It is the source of all our energies, the home of all our happiness, and shall we not cling to it and praise it, seeing that it vegetates so grandly and so sadly, and that it is not for us to blame it for what, doubtless, it never knew it did."—Yours, etc.,

E. A. McDONALD.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hamstead).—Sunday, 12 noon; also Highbury Corner, 7 p.m.: Mr. L. ENTRY.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Blight of Dogma." Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.

Burnley (Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Cornholme.—Wednesday, May 12, 7-45 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Crawshawbooth.—Friday, May 7, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Saturday, May 8, 7 p.m.: Whist Drive. Tickets 2s.

Mansfield, Notts. (Clerkson Street Hall).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Debate, "The Case for Religion." Aff.: Mr. W. W. BRADWELL (N.C.L.C.). Neg.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY (N.S.S.)

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THE EARLY LIFE OF THOMAS PAINE

IV.

JOSEPH PAINE'S father was a farmer, and probably an early member of the Society of Friends, although his name does not appear in the persecutions which befel the Society in Thetford in the seventeenth century. He is described by Oldys as "a small but reputable farmer." Joseph was born at Thetford in 1708, and on April 18, 1737, was made a freeman of the borough, signing the register with a final *e* to his name. He is stated by Oldys to have been "a reputable citizen, and, though poor, an honest man." He was a Quaker, and his wife a member of the Church of England. "By thus taking his wife from the Church," says Oldys, "Joseph Paine was by his own act, and the rules of the Quakers, at once expelled from their community. But neither this irregularity nor this expulsion prevented that benevolent sect from pitying his distresses through life, and relieving his wants as they were seen. The father and mother both lived to know their son's vices, to pity his misfortunes, to hear of his fame but to partake little of his bounty." This is a sample of the malicious falsehood that was circulated about Paine by bigoted and unscrupulous enemies. As a matter of fact, Joseph Paine was throughout life a member of the Society of Friends at Thetford, and was buried as a Quaker; his son's vices existed only in his enemies' imagination; and whatever clash of temperament there may have been between mother and son, he maintained her in her old age, and stayed with her at Thetford for some time when she was 91 years of age.

Their son Thomas was born on January 29, 1737, and in the register of St. Cuthbert's parish, Thetford, is the following entry relating to a daughter: "Elizabeth, daughter of Joseph Payne and Frances his wife, of this parish, was born August the 29th, 1738, baptised September ye 20th, 1738." There are no records of other children, nor do we know anything further of the life of Paine's parents, though in 1787, as appears in a letter from father to son, both belonged to the Quaker Meeting. His father was buried in St. Cuthbert's Churchyard in 1786, the entry in the register being: "Joseph Payne (a Quaker), aged 78 years, Nov. 14th." His mother was also buried there in 1790, the entry being: "Frances Paine (widow), aged 94 years, May 18th."

His earlier biographers simply mentioned that Paine was born at Thetford, but gave no indication as to street or house. The first definite information obtainable is an entry in the diary of Clio Rickman, a friend of Paine. He wrote: "On September 12th, 1805, I drove with Mr. Capel Loft to Thetford from Troston Hall, and there visited the house and sat in the chamber in which Thomas Paine was born. This was in Bridge-street, Thetford." In a plan of Thetford drawn by Thomas Martin about 1740, and now in the possession of Mr. Walter Rye, the present Bridge-street and White Hart-street are jointly marked as "Bridgegate-street." In 1809 G. B. Burrell gave a list of "Remarkable Events" in his "Charities of Thetford", and under date 1737 entered: "Thomas Paine, the celebrated author of the 'Rights of Man', born in the house now occupied by Mr. Noah Baker, January 29th." When Dr. Conway published his splendid "Life of Thomas Paine" in 1892, he said: "The house was in Bridge-street (now White Hart), and has recently made way for a pretty garden and fountain." Tradition always indicated the top of the west side of White Hart-street as the site of the house in which Paine was born, but the fountain to which Dr. Conway referred is on the east side, and he subsequently admitted that this was a mistake.

On the other hand, there was an impression that the actual house was one of several which were pulled down about 1886 to make a garden on the west side. In a review of Dr. Conway's "Life," Mr. F. H. Millington, J.P., said: "The house stood near the top of White Hart-street, and, although pulled down, it

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is said that the room where Paine was born still remains." It was to one of these houses that pilgrimages were paid by Charles Bradlaugh, Annie Besant, George Jacob Holyoake, and others, and when Mr. Holyoake visited Thetford in 1882 he had this portion of the street photographed. His daughter, Mrs. E. Holyoake-Marsh, has kindly lent me the photo, and on the back, in Mr. Holyoake's writing, it is noted that "the house of the white streak is Paine's birthhouse. G. J. H." The old "Fleece" inn then stood at the bottom of Croxton-road, facing White Hart-street, and the photo was taken from the southern end of the house now occupied by Mr. G. O. Read. On the west side of White Hart-street the photo shows, firstly, a wall with lime trees behind it, then a house with a porch on two pillars (still standing). Then on the space now occupied by Mrs. Tyrrell's garden) is a cottage, then a house with a shop window, and beyond it one with a gable similar to the one preceding, and showing a white streak. This house had three bedroom windows, two windows on the ground-floor, and a porch with one step immediately adjoining Mrs. Tyrrell's house to the southward, but now pulled down. The gable was some feet lower than that of her house, and no part of it is incorporated in the present building

W. G. CLARKE.

(To be continued)

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